



# CALIFORNIA STATE THREAT ASSESSMENT CENTER

## 24-HOUR REPORT

17 FEBRUARY 2021

### (U) CALIFORNIA

#### (U) San Francisco – Garbage Truck Driver Arrested in Connection to Sandalwood Fire

(U) Antonio Ornelas-Velazquez, a garbage truck driver, has been arrested in connection with the 2019 Sandalwood fire that killed two people and burned more than 1,000 acres. Ornelas-Velasquez was taken into custody on Saturday by peace officers with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. Ornelas-Velazquez is accused of igniting the deadly fire after he dumped a burning load of trash next to dry vegetation. The fire spread, resulting in two civilian deaths, 72 structures destroyed, 16 structures damaged, and more than 1,000 acres of vegetation burned.

SOURCE: 16 February 2021, [NBC News](#)

### (U) SOUTHWEST BORDER

#### (U) Texas – DHS Border Officer Caught Smuggling Illegal Immigrant

(U) Laredo – US Customs and Border Protection Officer Rhonda Walker, who worked at the Laredo Port of Entry, used her job to smuggle a woman into the country under false pretenses to work as a housekeeper. CBP's Office of Professional Responsibility got wind of the scam through an anonymous tip in June 2020 and had been watching Officer Walker and her residence over the months to try to piece together what was happening. Officials tracked down a wire payment Officer Walker made to the housekeeper's family in Mexico and obtained video of the officer walking out to the middle of the border crossing bridge on 2 January and escorting the woman into the United States. Officer Walker then used another officer's login to finish the admissions process for the housekeeper.

SOURCE: 14 February 2021, [Your Basin](#)

#### (U) Arizona – Canine Detects Three Illegal Aliens Hiding in Trunk at Immigration Checkpoint

(U) Yuma – A Yuma Sector canine alerted to a vehicle in which three Mexican nationals were found hiding in the trunk on Thursday at the Interstate 8 immigration checkpoint. Yuma Sector Border Patrol agents assigned to the checkpoint encountered a Chrysler sedan at approximately 7:45 a.m. Agents referred the vehicle to the checkpoint's secondary inspection area due to the suspicious behavior of the driver and passenger. A search of the vehicle revealed three Mexican nationals hiding in the vehicle's trunk. A fourth Mexican national was also discovered hiding on the floorboard behind the driver and passenger seat. In addition, agents found a loaded handgun, and personal use amounts of methamphetamine, narcotic pills, marijuana and drug paraphernalia. The driver and passenger, both citizens of California, were arrested, and the four Mexican nationals were transported to the Wellton Station for further processing.

SOURCE: 16 February 2021, [USCBP Newsroom](#)

### (U) NATIONAL

#### (U) District of Columbia – Terrorist Designation for Houthis in Yemen Lifted

(U) Washington DC – The Biden administration officially lifted the designation of the Iranian-backed Houthis in Yemen as a global terrorist organization. The original designations came at a time when the

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country was facing an unprecedented set of catastrophes including an intense famine. The famine is severe enough that half the Yemeni population was close to starvation. US leaders have stated the choice to lift the designations is in an attempt to remedy the dire humanitarian situation in Yemen. SOURCE: 16 February 2021, [Al Jazeera](#)

### **(U) District of Columbia – Pentagon Report Reveals Inroads White Supremacists Have Made in Military**

(U) Washington DC – Pentagon officials have acknowledged that the extent of the military's extremism problems has not been tracked very well. A previously unpublicized October 2020 report to Congress details the military's efforts to keep extremists, particularly fascists, out of the military. The report details new security measures the military is using to kick-out these types of individuals, including improving security clearance questions and reviewing the FBI's database of extremist tattoos. SOURCE: 16 February 2021, [Roll Call](#)

### **(U) District of Columbia – DOJ Charges North Korean Hackers with \$1.3 Billion Theft Conspiracy**

(U) Washington DC – The US Justice Department unsealed charges Wednesday against three North Korean hacker spies accused of conspiring to steal and extort more than \$1.3 billion in cash and cryptocurrency from banks and businesses around the world. The indictment builds upon 2018 charges brought against one of the alleged hackers in connection with the North Korean regime's 2014 cyberattack on Sony Pictures Entertainment, marking the first time the US charged a Pyongyang operative. The move shows the degree to which North Korea relies on financial cybertheft to obtain hard currency in a country whose main exports are under UN and US sanctions, and that is further isolated by a self-imposed blockade due to the COVID-19 pandemic. SOURCE: 17 February 2021, [The Washington Post](#)

## **(U) INTERNATIONAL**

### **(U) Australia – Olympic Swimming Medalist Charged with Running Alleged Drugs Syndicate**

(U) Sydney – Former Australian swimming star Scott Miller was arrested on drugs charges in a dawn raid at his home Tuesday, with Sydney police alleging the Olympic medalist heads a gang supplying methamphetamine across New South Wales state. A police statement on the arrests, which did not name Miller, said detectives charged two men as part of ongoing investigations into the supply of more than \$1.56 million worth of methamphetamine concealed in candles. Miller's arrest is part of a larger investigation. Earlier this year, New South Wales authorities began looking into the criminal syndicate involved in the supply of illegal drugs, mostly meth, across the state, according to the police statement. SOURCE: 16 February 2021, [CNN](#)

### **(U) France – Cyber Attacks Hit Two French Hospitals in One Week**

(U) Villefranche-sur-Saône – Ransomware attacks struck two French hospital groups in less than a week, prompting the transfer of some patients to other facilities but not affecting care for COVID-19 patients or virus vaccinations. The attack by the crypto-virus RYUK, a kind of ransomware, "strongly impacts" the Villefranche, Tarare, and Trévoux sites of the North-West Hospital. France's National Agency for the Security of Information Systems (ANSSI) is helping to investigate the attack. The North-West Hospital's statement came on the same day that ANSSI said it had discovered a hack of several organizations that bore the hallmarks of a group linked to Russian intelligence. SOURCE: 16 February 2021, [France24](#)

### **(U) Nigeria – Gunmen Storm School, Kidnap Students**

(U) Kaduna – Unidentified gunmen attacked a secondary school in Nigeria's Niger state overnight and abducted many students. The assailants stormed the Government Science college in the Kagara district

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at around 2 AM, overwhelming the school's security detail. A spokeswoman said many students had been abducted, but did not specify how many or the identity of the assailants. Militant Islamist group Boko Haram and a branch of ISIS are active in northern Nigeria, but kidnappings by other armed groups, mostly for ransom, are also common. The Niger state governor will address the media on Wednesday and provide additional information.

SOURCE: 17 February 2021, [US News](#)

### **(U) Russia – 19 Militants Planning Attacks Detained by Russian Federal Security Service**

(U) Moscow – Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) said on Wednesday it had detained 19 suspected Islamist militants planning attacks in the North Caucasus. The FSB said it had seized a suicide belt, homemade bombs, and automatic weapons from the suspects this month. The 19 detainees, suspected members of the Takfir wal-Hijra Islamist group, were spread across the Rostov, Krasnodar, and Karachay-Cherkessia regions, as well as Crimea, the peninsula Moscow annexed from Ukraine in 2014. Russia has repeatedly been targeted by Islamist militant groups, including in an attack on a train carriage in a St. Petersburg metro tunnel in 2017.

SOURCE: 17 February 2021, [US News](#)

**(U) PREPARED BY THE CALIFORNIA STATE THREAT ASSESSMENT CENTER.**

**(U) FOR QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS, PLEASE EMAIL [STAC@CALOES.CA.GOV](mailto:STAC@CALOES.CA.GOV), OR CALL 916-636-2900.**

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